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MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

BY MURIEL HARRIS

To have been born an Arnold implies in England a tradition of culture and achievement from which no member of the family can hope to escape. Many Arnolds have distinguished themselves along more or less conventional lines. In others the intellectual yeast worked itself out in eccentricity, in religious struggles, in political protest, even in fads. If their genius was unrecognized, it was none the less there, and four generations of gifted Arnolds—of reformers, poets, historians, scholars, scientists—is a record that is rare enough. Of such stock was Mary Arnold—Mrs. Humphry Ward.

Almost the whole of her generation distinguished itself as much as, if less successfully than did she. Her brother, William Arnold, was a scholar and statesman. One of her sisters, following directly in the Arnold tradition, founded a famous school. Another sister was a notable lecturer. The present generation shows the same quality. Julian Huxley, the biologist, is Mrs. Ward's nephew. Another nephew, Aldous, is a poet of no mean capacity, while young Tom Arnold—one of the many lives cut short by the war, showed at the early age of fourteen remarkable poetic thought and facility.

Even in their marriages, the Arnolds never deviated from their tradition. The Selwyns, the Huxleys, the Trevellyans, the Wales, into whose families they have married both amplify and underline the Arnold tradition of learning and achievement. With their strong brains, their queer corners, their passion for activity and their sense of direction, they are among the most English of the English. Centuries earlier, they would have sailed in the Mayflower, combining with their social-religious protest, that taste for adventure which makes so many Englishmen love England

as a point of departure. Mrs. Ward was an Arnold of the Arnolds in her sense of rightness, her zest for literary and political activities and in her need to give that zest practical form. She differed from her family in one point. Where they remained people of moderate means, she was financially eminently successful. This was out of the tradition, since success often obviates the need to protest and every Arnold is a natural Protestant. Instead Mrs. Ward was a propagandist.

It is probable that if propaganda had been a fine art in Mrs. Ward's youth, she would have been among the most distinguished propagandists. As it was, the novel with a purpose, the pamphlet, the social undertaking, the political tendency, these were the breath of life to her. In the double motive, as it were, of all her work—the artistic, coupled with the political or the social or the religious—she made a peculiar appeal to the England of her day—the England which had emerged from the grosser prosperity of the industrial era and was looking for its soul. As a novelist, Mrs. Oliphant was far beyond Mrs. Ward. But she was a novelist pure and simple, an artistic entity which English people are slower to appreciate than when it is combined with moral or political purpose. Mrs. Ward gave to the novel-reader the sense that he or she was not merely wasting time in reading stories. She implied that he was thinking and reforming and governing and having religious difficulties himself, all in the most interesting and romantic way. She gave to the politician a sense of romance which he had not hitherto perceived among the dry dust of party manoeuvrings. Trollope described politics with an exactitude and humor that were almost too much like the real thing. Mrs. Ward was thrilled by them herself and she conveyed that thrill to the reader. She conveyed to him that politics were really a series of week-ends in great country-houses, where high purpose was mingled with the atmosphere rich and rare of great minds, and it was his privilege, that of the ordinary commonplace reader, to share in these august assemblies and help to run the England of their making.

In the same way, the social reformer at her hands was no mere drab worker among the poor, no illiterate, inarticulately fighting for his beliefs, no dryasdust airing his theories. He became the hero of a popular novel. However

improbable his schemes, they carried him so far that he could be rude to duchesses and they liked it. There was a great deal of Charlotte Brontë's 'Rochester' in Mrs. Ward's heroes, with their massive brows and eccentricities. More willingly than any other novelist, Mrs. Ward followed in the steps of the great woman romanticist. Her social reformers appealed to the multitude who were thrilled by her thrills. She was, in short, the propagandist, able at will to fire the ordinary person with fervor for causes or for people.

That her novels were artificial to a great many people, just because of their double motive, mattered less because of her own obvious conviction. She had the quality of belief. She believed in England—especially the England of the country-house and a poor tenderly looked after by the great. She believed in people and not to share that belief, when she really felt strongly, was to incur her displeasure. She believed in the great man as such. And above all she believed in a world in which the word 'culture' was writ large. Her panaceas for social problems are often a museum, even while she actually took much more practical steps to help the world out. She believed firmly all that she wrote and what she did not believe she never wrote.

One of her beliefs was that divorce was wrong. And so she wrote the novel *Daphne* to prove it. *Canadian Born* represented her belief in the glory of the British Empire. *Lady Rose's Daughter* stood for her belief in the ruling classes, even while they erred. *Marcella*, *Sir George Tresady*, were both expressions of her belief in a method of social reform. *Eleanor* glorified her belief in the great man—however tiresome.

The war brought forth a belief essay. It is not remarkable that she was chosen by the British Government during the war to be the exponent of *England's Effort*. England—the idea of England, the England of the Arnolds, was a subject to which she could with the fullest heart give the whole outpouring of her patriotic feeling. Every soldier was a hero; every hero died with 'England' on his lips. And if too many of these soldiers were generals—some of whom had made ghastly mistakes, costing thousands of lives, and if all spirits did not always find glory in the mud and blood and beastliness that is called war—why then, they were hero-ized by the flood of enthusiasm which

Mrs. Ward honestly felt for them. A better propagandist could not have been found, because no one but a real Victorian could so have concentrated on one point to the exclusion of so many cognate points. It is a mark of her power of propaganda that she begins her war-novel with characters who are definitely anti-war and devoted instead to the study of Greek. There is no attempt to minimize their right to an opinion; on the contrary, it is made rather attractive. But, in the end of course, their conversion is proportionately more effective.

The propagandist—the really successful propagandist—must inevitably be able to believe two things at once, whether or not they happen to coincide. And the greater his faith, the more telling will be his work. Mrs. Ward was a confirmed anti-suffragist. She was head of the anti-suffragist party and, both by pen and voice and great personal influence in the House of Lords, struggled against the giving of the vote to women. Incidentally, she was a good loser, too, and when the Suffrage Bill became law took her defeat gracefully, writing that at the moment of her defeat she could not help feeling how pleased she would be in Mrs. Fawcett's place. On the other hand, she believed firmly in municipal work for women, did much to promote it and recently became herself one of the first women justices. But opposed as she was to the suffrage, she saw no inconsistency in her strenuous efforts to put her son into Parliament, where he was nicknamed the Member for Mrs. Humphry Ward. Here again, her powers as propagandist came into play and by a series of very able "Letters to my Neighbors," which were afterwards printed and used widely by other candidates, she effectively won her son his seat, where he represented her views to the last fraction.

It is difficult to reconcile the two attitudes, unless one remembers that Mrs. Ward was thoroughly romanticist by temperament. Always deeply interested in current questions, religious, social, political, this interest became officialized, as it were, with Gladstone's sixty-page review of *Robert Elsmere*. Hitting off exactly, as it did, the religious problems which were agitating people at large, this novel thrust her into the forefront of the then "new thought" and thence it was but a short step to the practicalities of politics and social reform.

Mrs. Ward was at heart a hero-worshipper of all gov-

ernment—preferably good government, but still government, for bad government has the advantage of being reformable. I do not suppose there was ever a government which left no room for reform, but if there was, it would be a bad day for the reformer and Mrs. Ward was a born reformer. In this capacity, she pictured herself and others of the elect in the romantic rôle of aiding with counsel, and privately, those who were to carry out the great work. It was to be no mob of women voters, all with the same right to give counsel, but a Paradise of the few. It was not to be shouted in the market-place, but whispered amid cloistered shades. Hence her instinctive dislike for the vote, even while in her own mind she permitted women to fill subordinate offices. Herself the friend of Asquith, Grey, Balfour, Haldane, of most of the prominent politicians of the day, she invested them with a golden romantic atmosphere, discussed with them all the leading questions of the times, played the rôle of Egeria, which obviously did not include the vote at large.

On the social side, Mrs. Ward was also a propagandist, but here perhaps the double thread harmonized most perfectly. It is not only her novels, which are full of schemes for the betterment of the less fortunate, full of sympathy for those whose lots are cast in unpleasant places. She does not only write about poverty and squalor and hardship. Her intense love for her little grandchildren was founded on a broad basis. Her Passmore Edwards Settlement work is well known in this country. Her work for crippled children and for London children generally, is often obscured by her other outstanding achievements. The Play Centres were the beginning of a great movement in London to improve social conditions not only at the end but at the beginning of life. In spite of London's many parks, there were yet, in its huge extent, thousands of children in the poorer districts whose only playground was the street. This had the inevitable consequences in accidents, poor health, juvenile delinquency. Mrs. Ward began her work in a small way, by opening privately a Play Centre or two and securing workers from among her friends. Games were organized and those who wished could follow occupations—wood-carving, needlework, drill, dancing. The success of the original Play Centres was instantaneous and it became something of a tragedy to turn away children for whom there

was no room. A system was organized by which children took turns in coming, but obviously here was a great need and one which demanded to be met. The work might have stopped short or have run its promoters into debt in extending it indefinitely. Mrs. Ward, with statesmanlike instinct, conceived of the idea of using schools for play as well as for work. The idea, obvious enough now, but regarded at the time as an innovation, went through amid much headshaking on the part of the authorities generally. In the end, and after immense labor and organization, the Play Centres were extended all over London and when sufficient voluntary helpers could not be found, money was raised and competent and carefully chosen helpers were employed, who otherwise could not have afforded to give their time. Occupations and amusements extended their scope and five-year-old Percy in plush breeches and with a perpetual cold in his nose, flocked to the Play Centre as eagerly as did Florence on the verge of leaving school, and giving herself airs in consequence.

Nor did her work among children stop here. Crippled children also came under her care and she was one of the first people to conceive of the idea of making the lives of these unfortunate children as normal as was possible under the circumstances. They all came to her—some pushed by their mothers in long chairs—children who otherwise never had an outing; some carried, some hobbling along on their crutches; some, who were merely hump-backed, helping to bring more unfortunate friends. Their health was the first consideration and many of them recovered to a certain extent through the care given and the opportunities provided of country air and good food. They were taught occupations according to their capacity, and at Christmas—there never were such Christmases as these—they used act a little play, of which the hero often limped and the heroine too often perforce reclined upon a couch. The enjoyment of these crippled knights in brown paper armour and of wan princesses in gilt crowns was beyond all words. Among them all Mrs. Ward used constantly to go. Often they were a little shy of her dominant voice and rather grand manner, but at bottom they knew that, but for her, perhaps none of them would wear brown paper armour or gilt crowns. Here the propagandist and the human being were entirely one. The development of Mrs. Ward's work—of the Arnold tra-

dition of social obligation—is carried on by both her daughters, one of whom has been the promoter of excellent dental clinics for schoolchildren in London and both of whom interest themselves actively in after-care work among children just leaving school and children with enfeebled health.

You cannot dogmatize without a sense of rightness. The Victorians had this sense very strongly. The Arnolds were essentially Victorian. Dr. Arnold of Rugby invented a new system of morals for public schools. William Arnold, Mrs. Ward's brother, would have fought under Cromwell with all the charm of a cavalier. A scholar of the first water, he knew how to control rightness—my rightness as opposed to your rightness—and to keep it in proportion. One of the most brilliant men of his time, he might have achieved anything but for ill-health. Mrs. Ward's rightness was more dogmatic, partly because she was less disciplined, partly because she was a romanticist and colored things as she wished them to be. She corresponded with all the eminent people of her time and was intimate with many of them. They used to come to the house in Grosvenor Place, with its beautiful pictures, but they, as did lesser people, found her most herself during the happy week-ends at Stocks. Here the week-end parties used to include Trevelyan and Huxleys, Lord Haldane was a frequent visitor, Lord Grey, Henry James, the Asquiths, the Rothschilds—all used to contribute to the philosophical, literary or political discussion in which Mrs. Ward revelled. Frequently also they would join in the games, terrifying to the less gifted—of cap-versing and other intellectual acrobatics. From the truly great, Mrs. Ward would take any contradiction, mind leaping to mind. But let a lesser personality attempt to defame one of her idols—and there were many of them—and the lesser personality was not long in regretting his temerity. She could not even bear reflections on minor points, such as dress or bearing. Any one whom she had once canonized was, once for all, perfect—to be worshipped as she worshipped them. The same characteristic applied equally to causes. She could tolerate the point of view of her peer, but she simply could not bear the differing point of view of any lesser light. This sense of rightness and her power of expression made her a formidable antagonist.

My pleasantest memory of Mrs. Ward dates back to the spring before the war—a Sunday in her country house at

Stocks. It was a day of fitful sunshine. Purple hyacinths scented the air and in the copse near the house, daffodils bloomed, thousands of them, their yellow heads swept by the breeze. Patches of sunlight flecked the smooth lawn. The grandchildren were there—a little Mary, remarkably like her grandmother, with the keen eye, the dominant character, the tendency to brush aside the non-essential.

The kindest of women, Mrs. Ward never suffered fools gladly. In her early married days at Oxford, she was centre of a group of intellectuals. She came of the George Eliot tradition, was indeed Elisha to her Elijah, carrying on George Eliot's passion for learning with perhaps something of the same self-consciousness that a woman should indeed read Greek before breakfast! But she mellowed greatly as she grew older and this mellowness was never more apparent than on that spring Sunday, in the tenderness which she showed to her own family, her passion for the flowers in her own beautiful home, her pride in her son, and her fondness for a little yapping Pomeranian dog, who, after the manner of Pomeranians all the world over, took liberties under her august protection, which did not make for his general popularity. I see her now, wearing a long cloak, sweeping, stately, across the wide lawn to greet her friends, her face alight and the dark, hawk-like features losing something of their keenness in the welcoming smile.

With her death, a great personality has passed away, many-sided, full of beliefs; belonging actually to the comfortable, leisurely world before the war; carrying with it some of the old-time fragrance, upon which a new world has no time to dwell. A new set of problems has outstripped her, who was in the forefront of the problems of her day. Outwardly successful and prosperous, she had many sorrows, so bravely borne as to show the real grit of the woman, the underlying Arnold fibre. Her enthusiasms, her generosity to all and sundry, her warm and ample personality, link her up with all outstanding characters, whose very antagonisms, once they are no longer there, inspire the greater affection in those who are left behind.

MURIEL HARRIS.